

I claim:

1. An apparatus for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said device comprising:
  - a steam generator disposed within a housing means, said steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure;
  - heating means to heat said sealable canister;
  - a manually operated valve which is attached to said sealable canister, wherein said manually operated valve provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to;
  - a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning zone whereby small items such as jewelry may be cleaned by immersion therein; and,
  - a catch basket which is disposed on said housing means, said catch basket having a screen member which is disposed underneath said terminating end of said steam tube and oriented to laterally traverse said jet of steam to trap small gems which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass freely therethrough.
2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said heating means is automatically controlled by a thermostat, said thermostat is mounted to said sealable canister wherein said

thermostat controls the pressure of said water and steam mixture within said sealable canister.

3. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said manually operated valve is manually operable by a valve actuator button means disposed on said housing means, thereby obviating the need for remotely positioned manually operated valves requiring cumbersome cabling structures.
4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said steam tube is made of a thermoplastic material.
5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said steam tube is rigid in shape, said terminating end of said steam tube is oriented vertically such that said jet of steam is adapted to be projected generally downward in direction.
6. The apparatus of claim 5, wherein said housing means comprises a front sidewall, said front sidewall having an aperture for receipt of said steam tube therethrough, said front sidewall being concave in shape in order to conform to the lateral space defined by said cleaning zone and to minimize the lateral distance which said steam tube projects beyond said front sidewall.
7. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said sealable canister further comprises a pressure safety valve means for automatically releasing said steam in said sealable canister to ambient environment if the pressure in said sealable canister exceeds a predetermined level.
8. The apparatus of claim 7, wherein said predetermined level of pressure in sealable canister is less than 15 psi.

9. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said sealable canister has a maximum water holding capacity of up to 16 ounces of fluid.
10. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said catch basket further comprises slidable insertion means for removable attachment to said housing means.
11. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein said housing means further comprises tong holding means for the efficient and easily accessible storage of conventional tongs.
12. A method for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said steps comprising:

providing a steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure, heating means to heat said sealable canister, a manually operated valve which is attached to said sealable canister, wherein said manually operated valve provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning zone;

connecting said heating means to a suitable source of electrical power;

actuating said manually operated valve thereby causing a jet of steam to be emitted from said terminating end of said steam tube; and,

immersing said small item to be cleaned in said cleaning zone.
13. The method of claim 12, wherein said steam generator is disposed in a housing means, said housing means having a catch basket disposed thereon, said catch

basket having a screen member which is disposed underneath said terminating end of said steam tube and oriented to laterally traverse said jet of steam to trap small gems which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass freely therethrough.

14. The method of claim 12, wherein said heating means is automatically controlled by a thermostat, said thermostat is mounted to said sealable canister wherein said thermostat controls the pressure of said water and steam mixture within said sealable canister.
15. The method of claim 12, wherein said manually operated valve is manually operable by a valve actuator button means disposed on said housing means, thereby obviating the need for remotely positioned manually operated valves requiring cumbersome cabling structures.
16. The method of claim 12, wherein said steam tube is made of a thermoplastic material.
17. The method of claim 12, wherein said steam tube is rigid in shape, said terminating end of said steam tube is oriented vertically such that said jet of steam is adapted to be projected generally downward in direction.
18. The method of claim 17, wherein said steam generator is disposed in a housing means, said housing means comprises a front sidewall, said front sidewall having an aperture for receipt of said steam tube therethrough, said front sidewall being concave in shape in order to conform to the lateral space defined by said cleaning

zone and to minimize the lateral distance which said steam tube projects beyond said front sidewall.

19. The method of claim 12, wherein said sealable canister further comprises a pressure safety valve means for automatically releasing said steam in said sealable canister to ambient environment if the pressure in said sealable canister exceeds a predetermined level.
20. The method of claim 19, wherein said predetermined level of pressure in sealable canister is less than 15 psi.
21. The method of claim 12, wherein said sealable canister has a maximum water holding capacity of up to 16 ounces of fluid.
22. The method of claim 12, wherein said catch basket further comprises slidable insertion means for removable attachment to said housing means.
23. An apparatus for cleaning small items such as jewelry using a jet of steam, said device comprising:
  - a steam generator disposed within a housing means, said steam generator having a sealable canister for holding a heated water and steam mixture under pressure;
  - heating means to heat said sealable canister;
  - a manually operated valve means which provides selective communication of said steam from said sealable canister to;
  - a steam tube which is attached to said manually operated valve means for communicating said steam to the terminating end of said steam tube, said terminating end is adapted to emit said jet of steam to the ambient environment, whereby the space defined by said jet of steam defines a cleaning

zone whereby small items such as jewelry may cleaned by immersion therein;  
and,

a catch basket means which is disposed on said housing means to trap small gems  
which may inadvertently become dislodged by said jet of steam during the  
cleaning operation while simultaneously allowing said jet of steam to pass  
freely therethrough.